

**CONTACT: Dave Burnett**  
**Southeast Kansas Regional Planning Commission**  
PO Box 664  
Chanute, KS 66720-0664  
**Phone:** 316-431-0080  
**Fax:** 316-431-4805  
**E-mail:** [dburnett-rpc@terraworld.net](mailto:dburnett-rpc@terraworld.net)

## **Background**

The Economic Development District (EDD) operates as the Southeast Kansas Regional Planning Commission (SEKRPC). SEKRPC is an association of county governments established by interlocal agreements under Kansas Statute 12-716 in 1974. Currently, the District is comprised of Allen, Anderson, Bourbon, Cherokee, Coffey, Crawford, Labette, Linn, Montgomery, Neosho, Wilson, and Woodson Counties. The Oklahoma state line forms the southern border of the District and the Missouri State Line forms the eastern border. The District encompasses approximately 7,064 square miles and is home to approximately 205,000 persons.

There are no metropolitan areas within the District; however, the center of the region is somewhat equidistant from Tulsa, Oklahoma; Joplin and Kansas City, Missouri; and Wichita, Kansas. The extremities of the region are generally within an hour's drive of one of these cities. Cherokee County virtually adjoins the city limits of Joplin, Missouri.

The border counties experience the give and take of the economies of the nearby metropolitan areas. These metropolitan areas impact the regional labor pool by attracting employees from the region and putting increasing competitive pressure on recruiting and wages. However, this can be a two-edged sword. Oklahoma's highway system enhancements will mean that more Oklahomans will now have the potential to work in Kansas.

Although local medical and hospital services are available in close proximity to most communities, advanced medical treatment generally requires a trip to one of the metropolitan areas mentioned above. Limited (but improving) retail shopping opportunities within the region serve to propel the region's consumers to the malls of Kansas City, Wichita, Joplin, Bartlesville, and Tulsa.

The District's economic base continues to be a proportional mix of agriculture and industry. Economic factors presented in the 1998 Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) will demonstrate that the region continues to lag substantially behind the State of Kansas and the nation, as a whole, in key economic

indicators such as wages, household income, and unemployment.

### **The Purpose**

The 1998 CEDS prioritizes issues that impede economic prosperity and growth on both a regional-specific and county-specific level. Regional and county-specific strategies for dealing with Priority Issues are delineated in the 1998 CEDS. The 1998 CEDS serves as a resource guide to government officials, community leaders, and development practitioners. The goals and Program of Work represent the efforts of the EDD to collaborate in the use of scarce, natural, human and programmatic resources. This document reflects the efforts of the region's economic development infrastructure to reduce duplication of effort and realize greater economies of scale in development practice throughout the EDD. The 1998 CEDS will serve to outline activities and program strategies that are to be implemented through the year 2003.

### **The Process - A Summary**

A twelve-member Regional CEDS Committee was appointed by the SEKRPC governing body and the respective Board of County Commissioners to oversee the 1998 CEDS process. The Regional CEDS Committee was charged with the responsibility of providing staff with County-Specific Priority Issues and Strategies as developed through their county's respective strategic planning process. The Regional CEDS Committee served as the ultimate approval authority before the final draft was written. Additionally, each county was asked to form a CEDS Review Committee. The respective county appointees to the Regional CEDS Committee also served to chair their county's CEDS committee.

The respective County CEDS Committees were composed of volunteers representing various interests ranging from local government, the private sector, business, industry, agriculture to education. The role of the committee was to certify that information contained in the CEDS truly represents the economic conditions, needs, issues, priorities, resources, and activities within the respective counties. Each committee was required to provide guidance to staff in developing the CEDS.

Staff services were provided by the SEKRPC. CEDS staff included the Executive Director, three staff Planning and Development Consultants, a Planning and Development Consultant Trainee, an Executive Assistant, and Office Assistant.

The most recently adopted Strategic Plan (as of January 1, 1998) from each of the respective counties was reviewed and compared to arrive at a preliminary list of Regional Priority Issues, Strategies and Plan of Work. These were reviewed by the Regional and County CEDS Committees in order to ensure that there was regional agreement regarding the issues and strategies synthesized from the county strategic plans.

To further insure that the 1998 CEDS continued to be constituent sensitive, the initial

draft of the 1998 CEDS Issues, Strategies, Plan of Work, complete demographic, socioeconomic, and labor force information were distributed to each Regional CEDS Committee member, County CEDS Committee members and units of government throughout the region. This process also served the purpose of developing a broader understanding of the current status of several different aspects of economic performance within the region.

For purposes of the 1998 CEDS, other areas addressed by the CEDS that directly affect economic performance such as, availability of natural resources, health services, schools, public safety, recreation, and cultural facilities, were all thoroughly reviewed to facilitate centralized planning and promote efficiency and economies of scale in producing effective outcomes. The results of a Resource Inventory Questionnaire that was sent to each of the District's counties and incorporated communities was included in the CEDS. A sample of the city and county survey is attached.

The CEDS also provides a listing of internal and external economic and community development resources available to the region. The city and county resource pages list the availability of economic development infrastructure, such as utilities and industrial parks. Local contact information is also provided.

By mid-February of 1999 a rough working document had been developed. This was submitted to the respective CEDS committees and County Commissions for review and revision. Some information and data were still missing, but the committees would begin the process of filling in the blanks and finalizing the document.

A final draft was then completed and submitted to the Regional CEDS Committee for review and revision. The draft CEDS was also made available to attendees at the March 5 Southeast Kansas Economic Alliance meeting at Neosho County Community College. The meeting was attended by more than 100 officials, leaders, and citizens from across the region. The CEDS was distributed and comment was invited. The Regional CEDS Committee adopted a final version of the CEDS.

The Board of County Commissioners of each of the twelve counties officially adopted the CEDS by resolution in April. On April 29, 1999 the SEKRPC governing body adopted the CEDS by resolution. The CEDS was then forwarded to EDA's Denver Regional Office where it was reviewed and approved.

### **The Product**

The SEKRPC CEDS is a product with features, advantages, and benefits. Who will benefit from the SEKRPC CEDS?

- Any person charged with public policy decisions impacting a southeast Kansas constituency on any level (local, state, or federal) can determine the priority economic development issues, goals and strategies for that

constituency by reviewing the CEDS. The priorities delineated in the CEDS ought to impact public policy.

- New economic development, personnel, newly elected public officials, or any interested citizen can easily locate vital contact resources by reviewing the CEDS. The economic data contained in the CEDS is a valuable economic development resource. The data will be updated annually.
- The Kansas Department of Commerce & Housing (KDOC&H) requires counties to participate in a strategic planning process and submit a plan for approval in order to qualify for job creation tax incentives under its Non-Metropolitan Enhanced Enterprise Zone Program. As of October 14, 1999 KDOC&H has verbally approved the use of the CEDS to satisfy the planning requirement. Each of the twelve participating counties will be able to reference the CEDS for a five-year Enterprise Zone Designation. Current single county planning provides a three-year designation.
- The CEDS is also a source of vital information regarding natural and physical resources within the region.
- The greatest benefit to the CEDS process is that it establishes a continuous review process on the county level that has been missing in some parts of the region. In this age of rapidly accelerating change, the rural counties and communities of southeast Kansas can compete and excel. The CEDS process initiated by SEKRPC provides citizens with an opportunity to act locally to improve the economy of their region.

### **Lessons Learned**

- Allow twice as much time as you think necessary to complete the process. Don't expect the coordination of multiple counties and multiple committees to flow flawlessly. Allow plenty of margin for scheduling conflicts. Do not plan on scheduling the bulk of the committee work from mid-May through Labor Day.
- Don't reinvent the wheel. If another planning document is current and useful, use it. Cut and paste, quote, paraphrase, synthesize, and plagiarize. The goal of the process is synergy. Bringing multiple plans and partners together in one process is not duplication, it is multiplication. It does not stifle creativity or innovation, it encourages it.
- The physical process of assimilating, formatting, and producing the narrative and data would have been impossible without paid staff. This document reflects constituent efforts, but that does not mean that it was not staff intensive. Seven different SEKRPC employees allocated time to the CEDS.
- Planning is not brain surgery or rocket science. Therefore, regional planning should be an inclusive process that encourages participation from every sector of the population. No one should be awed or intimidated by the process.

